

March 4, 2011

## Berryessa Facts

### Monticello Dam

- Dam Height 304 feet tall
- 90 ft wide at Base, 12 feet wide at crest
- Dam spans 1,023 feet across the canyon (Devil's Gate)

### Lake Berryessa

- 23 miles long at longest point, 3 miles wide at widest point
- 165 miles of shoreline.
- Storage capacity of 1.6 million acre-feet of water

## Early History of Lake Berryessa

Lake Berryessa is a manmade lake created to provide water for irrigation, municipal and industrial uses and flood control protection. Under the waters of Lake Berryessa lie ghost roads that once led to ranchers, farmers, miners, Native Americans, and Mexicans. The origin of the name Berryessa is from two brothers with the last name of Berryessa. The brothers, Jose Jesus and Sisto Berryessa, owned a significant portion of the land in and around the town of Monticello, now covered by the waters of Lake Berryessa.



The earliest dwellers of the Berryessa Valley were the Miwok and Patwin Indian tribes who lived on the valley floor along Putah Creek and its tributaries.

These Native Americans existed quite comfortably there until the early 1800's when early European settlers slowly forced them to leave the valley floor and settle in the surrounding hills.

In 1843, Governor Micheltorena signed official grant documents giving Jose Jesus and Sisto Berryessa 36,000 acres of land, which constituted the whole Berryessa valley. It was one of the largest land grants in California. The Berryessas constructed a huge adobe hacienda in the center of their property and had thousands of cattle, sheep, and horses on the surrounding acreage. The Berryessas demise came when they lost piece after piece of their property through gambling and horseracing. Owing \$1645 to Edward Schultz, they were forced to sell him their remaining 26,000 acres in a county-petitioned auction for \$2,000. Schultz turned around and sold the land to the "Land Company" for \$100,000.

The Land Company then parceled the land into farm properties, leaving an area for the development of a town. In 1866, the town of Monticello was founded, and by 1870, there was a general store, blacksmith shops, several hotels and businesses, and a four-horse stage line running from Knoxville to Napa via Monticello. In 1896, the Putah Creek Bridge was constructed across Putah Creek in the center of Monticello town. This bridge has the unique distinction of still standing beneath the waters of Lake Berryessa today.



After gold was discovered in California, a vast migration passed through Solano County since it was on a direct route between San Francisco Bay and the gold fields. Communities grew rapidly, and agriculture expanded.

Following the severe drought in the 1860's, large-scale grain production began, followed by a more diversified agriculture based on irrigation and dry-land crops. Sheep and cattle production continued to hold an important place in the economy of the area. Specialty crops came into prominence as demand for agricultural products in the San Francisco Bay area increased and water well capability was developed. With the increased irrigation and the municipal and industrial development of the county, the demand for water resulted in the utilization of all of the more readily available sources of supply.



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## Development of Monticello Dam and the Solano Project

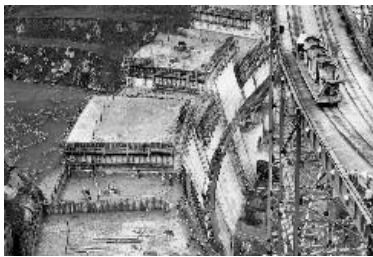
The problem of obtaining additional water to maintain existing and planned development became more and more critical. In 1907, the Mulholland-Goethals-Davis plan was formed which included storing water behind a dam at Devil's Gate in the Berryessa Valley. The plan never materialized. In 1908, the newly formed U.S. Bureau of Reclamation considered the Dixon plan to supply water to Dixon and Winters. It, too, never materialized. Several other ideas came and went until 1947, when Solano County in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation formed the Solano Project in order to provide water to Solano County and surrounding irrigable lands.



The [Solano Project](#) plan included building Monticello Dam, the Putah Diversion Dam, the Putah South Canal, the Terminal Dam and Reservoir, the Green Valley Conduit and distribution systems.

The Secretary of the Interior authorized the Solano Project on November 11, 1948, under the terms of the Reclamation Project Act of 1939.

Construction of the project began in 1953. Monticello Dam and the Putah Diversion Dam were completed in 1957 and the Putah South Canal was completed early in 1959.



The Monticello Dam, the Putah Diversion Dam, the Putah South Canal, and the Green Valley Conduit and distribution systems are owned by the Bureau of Reclamation and through an agreement operated and maintained by the Solano Irrigation District under contract with the Solano County Flood Control and Water Conservation District.

Lake Berryessa provides water annually to the cities of Vallejo, Vacaville, Fairfield, Benicia, and Suisun. Water is furnished through the city systems to Travis Air Force Base, Mare Island and Benicia Arsenal. At full pool (440 feet mean sea level) the lake is 23 miles long, 3 miles wide and stores 1,600,000 acre feet of water within the 165 miles of shoreline.

## Recreation Development

At the time of the lake's development, the Bureau of Reclamation lacked specific authority and funds to develop and manage recreation facilities, and in 1958, Napa County was persuaded to enter into a management agreement for the administration and development of recreation facilities.

The Bureau of Reclamation regained management of the recreational uses on and around the lake in 1974. Reclamation added three day use areas for the visiting public that are available today along with other recreational opportunities in the area.



Reclamation provides three free public day use areas, Oak Shores, Smittle Creek, and Capell Cove Boat Launch. The day use areas offer a spectacular view of the lake with picnic tables, barbeque grills, hiking trails, off-shore fishing, beach related activities and shade. More information to the day use areas can be found on the [Activities around the Lake](#) page.

Lake Berryessa also offers opportunities for camping, overnight use, restaurants, marinas, and other visitor services in seven resorts that are managed by private concessions under contract with Reclamation. Additional resort information can be found on our [Visitor Information](#) and [Resorts and Concessions Activities](#) links.

The concessions contracts for the seven existing resorts expire in 2008/2009. Reclamation is working to plan for the future of Lake Berryessa and to provide optimal visitor services for the recreational public that has reached approximately 1.5 million visitors per year. Additional information on the planning process is available at the [Lake Berryessa Visitor Services Planning Effort](#) website.



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## Wildlife

Primitive landscapes, easy water access, and conservation efforts make Lake Berryessa a wonderful location to view an incredible array of wildlife. Lake Berryessa and the surrounding area provide diverse habitats for a plethora of wildlife. The common visitor will get a chance to view some everyday wildlife such as squirrels, turkey vultures, deer, and ducks. Besides the usual wildlife, visitors may have a possibility of seeing rare animals such as bald eagles, red tailed hawks, mountain lions, bobcats, and more. The following list includes just some of the wildlife you may see on your visit to Lake Berryessa.

Go to this link to print brochures on [Watchable Wildlife, Birding Checklist, Natural History Guide, and Snakes of Berryessa](#). See our [Fishing](#) page for brochures and information on sport fish found at Lake Berryessa.

### [Photo Gallery](#)

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• American kestrel</li><li>• Bald Eagle</li><li>• Bobcat</li><li>• California King Snake</li><li>• Common Garter Snake</li><li>• Coyote</li><li>• Deer</li><li>• Golden Eagle</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gopher Snake</li><li>• Gray Fox</li><li>• Mountain Lion</li><li>• Osprey</li><li>• Raccoon</li><li>• Rattlesnake</li><li>• Red Tailed Hawk</li><li>• Ring neck Snake</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ring tail</li><li>• Rubber Boa</li><li>• Turkey Vulture</li><li>• Western Aquatic Garter Snake</li><li>• Western Yellow-Bellied Racer</li><li>• Western Terrestrial Garter</li><li>• Wild Turkey</li></ul> |
|---|--|--|

## Plants

Plant life surrounding Lake Berryessa is both old and new— in its mountain folds, streams, and steep slopes are found some of the most unique native species of California's Coastal Range flora. The Lake Berryessa region also supports recent exotic, even intrusive, newcomers.

Plant life in the Berryessa region is a mix of oak woodland, chaparral, grassland, and riverine woodland habitats. Flora that thrives in this area are adapted to cool winters, when most of the year's rain falls, and long dry summers. The Lake Berryessa region averages 24 inches of rainfall a year. One can find brushy drought resistant chaparral on sunny southern slopes close by ferns in shadows of the riverine cliffs.

Both oak and chaparral have woody branches with deep root systems that capture water, with leaves and stems that retain water. Leaves are commonly hard and waxy. This water-saving combination allows plants to thrive in arid-to-drought conditions, and to become adapted to accommodate brush fires common in this area.

The steep terrain surrounding the lake at this eastern edge of the Coastal Range serves to preserve the special plants that native Patwin tribes used before European settlement of this area. Early Californians never developed agriculture, and didn't need to. The land, plants, and animals supported a culture. The plants early local Californians used for food and medicine can still be found on the slopes and ravines around the lake.

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